

POLITICS & ASSASSINATION

THROUGHOUT the world, industrialization is spurring millions to want more—and to feel more thwarted when affluence and equality are too slowly achieved. In the highly industrialized U.S., the fever is intensified by racial and generational clashes. The result is impatience with the political process: a yen for direct action has created a charged emotional climate that inflames inherently violent minds.

Robert Kennedy was a natural target for what New York Psychiatrist Frederic Wertham calls "magnicide—the killing of somebody big." Historically, that somebody has often symbolized the political assassin's hated father; in the U.S., such murders are also frequently motivated by simple envy. Democracy, says Harvard Sociologist David Riesman, presents the question: "Why are you so big and why am I so small?" It is not legitimate to be a failure in America. And the frustration of failure, adds New York Psychiatrist David Abrahamsen, is "the wet nurse of violence."

Verbal Overkill

Equally inflammatory to unstable minds is the rising hyperbole of U.S. political debate. Race, Viet Nam, crime—all lend themselves to verbal overkill, not so much by candidates as by extremists: the John Birchers, the Rap Browns, the most ardent war critics, the Ku Kluxers. The evidence is everywhere. In Dallas, Assistant District Attorney William Alexander snarls on a TV show: "Earl Warren shouldn't be impeached—he should be hanged." Cries Rap Brown: "How many whites did you kill today?" Lyndon Johnson is routinely excoriated as a mass murderer. Robert Kennedy was branded by San Francisco hippies as a "fascist pig." Eventually verbal assassination becomes physical assassination.

"Assassination," George Bernard Shaw once wrote, "is the extreme form of censorship." In most U.S. cases, the assassins have indeed dedicated themselves to blotting out viewpoints that disagree with their own. When Sirhan Sirhan was seized after the shooting of Robert Kennedy, he cried: "I can explain! Let me explain!" The appalling thing is that he really thought that he could.

Many foreigners fear that U.S. violence is rapidly becoming almost banal, espoused by Maoists and Minute-men alike, routinely threatened—if not actually practiced—by students, racial militants and antiwar dissenters. Such fears sound odd coming from, say, the impeccably rational Frenchmen who only recently applauded student anarchists in Paris. Even so, the U.S. is undeniably starting to lead all advanced Western countries in what Swedish Economist Gunnar Myrdal calls "the politics of assassination." No French President has been murdered since 1932; West German leaders go virtually unguarded; the last (and only) assassination of a British Prime Minister occurred in 1812.

The key U.S. problem is the high importance of personality in most political campaigns. Whereas Europeans generally vote for parties rather than individuals, U.S. campaigning requires the candidate to plunge into crowds, to "press the flesh" until his right hand bleeds, to ride in open cars, to stand silhouetted against TV lights. Nor is the assassination in Los Angeles likely to alter such techniques. Two weeks before his death, Robert Kennedy himself told French Novelist-Diplomat Romain Gary: "There is no way to protect a candidate during an electoral campaign. You have to give yourself to the crowd and from then on count your luck." Kennedy, of course, pressed his luck recklessly.

There is a grim possibility that yet another candidate will become a target. What to do? Stop crowd contact, use sealed cars, exploit TV to the exclusion of almost

every other campaign tactic? In the Los Angeles aftermath, a stricken Eugene McCarthy pondered: "Maybe we should do it in a different way. Maybe we should have the English system of having the Cabinet choose the President. There must be some other way." But most politicians—including highly vulnerable Richard Nixon, Nelson Rockefeller, Hubert Humphrey and John Lindsay—emphatically veto such suggestions. If a candidate cannot mingle with crowds, said Rockefeller, "then we've lost one of the great resources and strengths of this great land of ours—freedom of movement, freedom of expression, freedom of the individual to go and be with the people."

All the same, steps can be taken to minimize the danger. For one thing, TV ought to be used more effectively—and at public expense to avoid domination by the richest candidates. Why not devote national network time to each major candidate for a full day or even two? For once, voters could view the whole man instead of fleeting images. On a more practical level, security can be sharply improved. Had the Secret Service been guarding Kennedy last week—as it will guard presidential candidates from now on—the route through the Ambassador Hotel's serving kitchen would have been scouted and secured by at least seven agents. Kennedy would also have had the benefit of a computer that the Service uses to keep check on individuals known to be dangerous. Programmed into the computer are the names of 100,000 possible assailants, largely taken from "hate" letters (which have risen startlingly since January). Whenever the President travels, local police keep such people under close surveillance. The U.S. might look to France for further ideas. When De Gaulle travels, his car is flanked by tough *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité* troopers on motorbikes; helicopters hover overhead, and the pace is a brisk 80 miles an hour or more. In towns en route, operating rooms are reserved in hospitals and a supply of De Gaulle's blood type is stocked.

Uncritical Lovers & Unloving Critics

Not that Americans want a police-state climate. It would hardly improve democracy; nor should the U.S. ironically honor Robert Kennedy by choosing fear over faith in people. Instead, the chief hope for excising the canker of political assassination is that a far more temperate political dialogue can somehow replace the incendiary language of anger, bigotry and vituperation—that millions of individual American citizens may now realize that freedom basically depends on persuading rather than provoking.

This, in turn, would require sluggish bureaucracies to respond more rapidly to social needs. John W. Gardner put it best at Cornell's commencement earlier this month, when he imagined himself as a 23rd century thinker. He had discovered, he said, that "20th century institutions were caught in a savage crossfire between uncritical lovers and unloving critics. On the one side, those who loved their institutions tended to smother them in an embrace of death, loving their rigidities more than their promise, shielding them from life-giving criticism. On the other side, there arose a breed of critics without love, skilled in demolition but untutored in the arts by which human institutions are nurtured and strengthened and made to flourish. Between the two, the institutions perished."

Gardner's dire diagnosis may or may not be overstated. What is beyond dispute is that all too many of the nation's most creative leaders are perishing, and that the trend must be checked by a national restoration of reason rather than emotion.

nine children, they have buried four: Joe Jr., who died in World War II; Kathleen, who perished in a 1948 plane crash; John, and now Bobby, at the age of 42. Rosemary, 48, has been a life-long victim of mental retardation. Ted, now the only remaining son, nearly died in a 1964 plane accident. While he was recovering Bobby cracked: "I guess the only reason we've survived is that there are too many of us. There are more of us than there is trouble." The curse of violent death has extended beyond the immediate family. Ethel's parents died in one plane crash, her brother George in another. George's wife Joan later choked to death on food lodged in her throat. Kathleen's husband was killed in World War II.

Last week, like most Americans, Rose and Joe Kennedy were asleep when the bullets struck. Ann Gargan, the niece who lives with them in Hyannisport, Mass., did not awaken them. But Rose got up around 6, as usual, to prepare for 7 a.m. Mass. She heard the news then. Joe heard it later when Ted telephoned him. Rose went to St. Francis Xavier Church, where a wing had been built in Joe Jr.'s memory, where a bronze plaque marks the pew that Jack used to occupy, where Bobby once served as an altar boy. Later that day, Cardinal Cushing came to offer what comfort he could. "She has more confidence in Almighty God," he said, "than any priest I have ever met."

Three Widows. Next morning came the news that the family had feared. At 1:44 a.m., Pacific Daylight Time, Bobby Kennedy had died under the eyes of his wife, his brother, his sisters Pat and Jean and his sister-in-law Jackie.

The Los Angeles medical examiner, Dr. Thomas Noguchi, presided over a six-hour autopsy attended not only by members of his own staff but also by three Government doctors summoned from Washington—again a lesson from Dallas. Sirhan was indicted for murder by a grand jury. Meanwhile, once again, the nation watched the grim logistics of carrying the coffin of a Kennedy home in a presidential Boeing 707. This time the craft carried three widows: Ethel, Jackie and Coretta King.

Everywhere, hundreds and thousands watched the cortege firsthand. Millions bore witness by television. The party arrived in New York City at 9 p.m. Thursday, and already the crowd was beginning to form outside St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. The church was not to be open to the public until 5:30 the next morning, but some waited on the sidewalks through the warm night. Then, thousands upon thousands, in line for as long as seven hours, they marched past the great bronze doors for a glimpse of the closed mahogany casket. The black, the young and the poor were heavily represented: Bobby Kennedy's special constituents.

Things That Never Were. There remained the final searing day, the day of formal farewell amid all the ancient

panoply of Roman Catholic ceremony and all the contemporary irony of American politics. There was Cardinal Cushing in his purple, his rumbling intonation evoking yet another memory of that earlier funeral. There was the President, who started his presidency by giving condolences to the Kennedys and now, near the end of his power, came to mourn the man who had helped shorten the Johnsonian reign. There were the men pausing in their pursuit of succession: Nelson Rockefeller and Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy. And there was Ralph Abernathy in his denims, William Fulbright, Averell Harriman, Barry Goldwater and so many others of the powerful and the prominent.

But in all the vastness of St. Patrick's Cathedral, it was from first to last a peculiarly personal Kennedy occasion. The women wore black, their daughters white; the Mass, even for the dead, carries the promise of life. Ethel and Rose displayed yet again the steely grace that seems to sustain all women born to or married to Kennedys. Children were a big part of Bobby's life, and played a part in the service. Four sons served as acolytes. Eight of their brothers, sisters and cousins bore the bread, the wine and the sacred vessels to the high altar.

It was Ted who acted as paterfamilias. His determinedly brisk voice betrayed him a few times, but the occasional hesitation only added to the power of his eulogy. "He loved life completely and lived it intensely," Ted said, in a reading that was unusual for a Roman Catholic funeral. Frequently using Bobby's own words, Ted concluded with the lines adapted from George Bernard Shaw that Bobby used to end many of his own speeches: "Some men see things as they are and say 'Why?' I

dream things that never were and say 'Why not?'" The service also showed ecumenical and modernist influences. The Mass was entirely in English. Some of the musical selections were strange to traditional Catholic rites.

Arlington. *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, that fierce old war song chanted tenderly by Andy Williams at the end of the funeral, was to be heard again and again during the afternoon as the special 21-car train bore the Senator and his family and his friends south to Washington. There were crowds and choirs at many of the communities along the right-of-way, more tears and dirges—and there was still more death. Two waiting mourners at Elizabeth, N.J., were killed by a train roaring in the other direction.

The funeral train inched on and on through the waning day, hours behind schedule. From the rear platform, Ted Kennedy, with short, sad gestures, thanked the people for coming out. At Baltimore, a memorial service was held on the platform as the train passed through.

Long after nightfall, it arrived in Washington. Along the lamplit streets, past a luminescence of sad and silent faces, the cavalcade wound through the federal city and across the Potomac, where in a green grove up the hill in Arlington, John Kennedy's grave looks out over the city and the river. The moon, the slender candles, the eternal flame at John's memorial—47 feet away—and the floodlights laved Robert Kennedy's resting place beneath a magnolia tree. It was 11 o'clock, the first nighttime burial at Arlington in memory. There was no playing of taps, no rifle volley. After a brief and simple service, the coffin flag was folded into a triangle for presentation to Ethel, and the band played *America the Beautiful*.



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After the pain, perhaps the awful grace?